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SUBJECT: DISTRICT DELIVERY PROGRAM MAKES STEADY PROGRESS

REF: A. KABUL 1093
[B.](#) KABUL 2270
[C.](#) KABUL 2383

[11.](#) Summary: Over the last seven weeks, the Afghan-led District Delivery Working Group (DDWG) has made steady progress toward extending Afghan government services to strategic or newly cleared districts. Major service delivery ministries and executive agencies, together with the Embassy, ISAF and some other international partners, have agreed on criteria for selecting districts in six pilot locations in the south and east. The ministries and agencies have also produced initial assessments of their possible resource needs in these districts. The group plans to meet next on October 4 to examine a coordinated Afghan government services package. If this process is ultimately successful, we believe it could serve as a model of how &Afghan first& can work. But there are challenges ahead: fostering coordination among jealously independent Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) ministries and agencies; finding ways to get qualified Afghan personnel deployed to the districts; and designing mechanisms able to ensure quick yet accountable transfer of resources to the local level and translating those resources into actual services delivered. Septel will provide a more in-depth look at the related District Support Team (DST) effort. End Summary.

The Context

[12.](#) In April 2009, Embassy Kabul announced plans to support more directly GIRoA efforts to build sub-national capacity by establishing a new platform for integrated civ-mil efforts, i.e. District Support Teams (Ref A). The plans envision the creation of 20 DSTs in the south and east to strengthen our civilian presence and help district officials increase their capacity to deliver basic services. DSTs will be integrated civ-mil command units that include three to five civilians from State, USAID and other agencies. Eventually they should evolve into embedded training teams supporting GIRoA efforts.

Working closely with U.S. military authorities, State and USAID have so far assigned at least one civilian to each of seven of the 20 districts originally identified for this exercise (Maywand and Spin Boldak in Kandahar; Garmser and Nawa in Helmand; Sarkani in Kunar; Khogyani in Nangarhar; and Seyadabad in Wardak); as well as to five other districts where they could add value to local governance and development efforts. Establishment of full civilian contingents and operations will depend on the security situation on the ground and the availability of Afghan government counterparts. The Afghan government is notably absent in many difficult districts, aside perhaps from a district administrator and police unit. We have had to encourage GIRoA to get teams out to districts to provide a cluster of services to the populations of recently secured districts. This is a key part of gaining support in these areas.

¶3. To address these issues, in August we and key Afghan ministries and agencies launched an initiative called the District Delivery program aimed at providing a much more robust GIRoA presence along with a package of basic services in selected & priority districts⁸ (ref B). By matching our DST deployments with the District Delivery initiative, we aim to boost both the short- and longer-term effectiveness of our DST contributions. Therefore we have taken special care in the pilot stage of the District Delivery program to mesh with our DST deployment plans. At the same time, we very much want the Afghans to lead as they move out to districts in a new way and to gain confidence for covering more districts in the future.

The Process

¶4. Since its inception on August 1, the new District Delivery Working Group (DDWG) has met weekly to develop a mechanism to deploy packages of government services quickly to districts that have recently been cleared or have strategic importance. This Afghan-led forum, launched with our encouragement, began with participation by the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD); Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL); Ministry of Education; Ministry of Public Health; Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG); UNAMA; ISAF; and the U.S. Recently, the Supreme Court as well as the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have joined the discussion. IDLG officials have encouraged the Attorney General's Office to take part to promote the dispatch of more prosecutors to the field, so far without success.

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District Selection

¶5. The most notable achievement of the group has been agreement on criteria for selecting districts and the identification of six pilot districts. There is agreement that priority districts should be secured, with good prospects for being held longer-term. They should also have high potential for development; high potential for an influx of governance resources to have a major positive impact on the local population; access for Afghan officials and relevant international partners; proximity to security forces; cluster potential for service delivery in nearby areas to build critical mass; and strategic or symbolic importance. After extensive discussion within the group and consultation with ISAF and U.S. forces, the working group (DDWG) agreed on a pilot phase in Nawa and Nad Ali in Helmand; Baraki Barak in Logar; Seyadabad in Wardak; Khogyiani in Nangarhar; and Sarkani in Kunar. The DWDG also identified several other districts with good potential that we will re-examine later.

Governance Packages

¶6. Two of the greatest challenges the DWDG faces is getting the individual ministries to identify what assets they might contribute to governance packages and then getting them to work with other ministries to combine these into a single, coordinated government services package. Unlike the USG, GIRoA does not have an executive entity, aside from the President himself, to set priorities authoritatively and compel inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination. Government ministries instead tend to guard their portfolios closely.

¶7. It is, therefore, remarkable that the DWDG has made as much progress as it has in getting so many major ministries and agencies on the same page in support of the District Delivery program. All have managed to produce initial proposals on what they might undertake in the pilot districts. The submissions are of varying quality, with the Supreme Court, for example, relying on the IDLG to help put together its contribution. Nevertheless, the outline of an integrated package is beginning to emerge. Over the current religious holiday period, ministries have been asked to

refine and re-submit their submissions, which the IDLG will attempt to meld into the first cut at a truly integrated package, in advance of the next DDWG meeting on October 4.

¶8. Individual ministries and agencies face varying degrees of difficulty in coming up with useful contributions to an integrated package of government services. The process has been fairly straightforward for the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), since its signature National Solidarity Program (NSP) already operates at the district and provincial levels. The difficulty has been in getting the ministry to link its work to that of other key ministries, rather than simply to press for additional direct U.S. funding. The IDLG is by definition already focused on provinces and districts but must now overcome persistent hurdles in getting qualified people to fill its many vacant district-level positions. The Ministry of Education has pre-designed packages, even for difficult areas, but needs security assurances and incentive packages to ensure enough teachers deploy. The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) is also accustomed to acting at the local level via its many health care centers, which are staffed by NGO doctors funded by USAID, the EC and World Bank. Because MOPH focused almost solely on infrastructure needs in developing its package, the DDWG has asked the ministry to consider what services it could deliver with short-term impact. The Agriculture Ministry (MAIL) is rarely represented at the district level and insists it cannot lay out with any precision a catalogue of planned activities until its people are on the ground to conduct a needs assessment. On the plus side, the ministry is recruiting 600 university graduates for field positions. Even the Ministry of Finance is looking to play its part by identifying additional responsibilities for its provincial finance officers to expedite transfer of resources to the districts.

Financing Mechanism

¶9. As reported ref B, the Ministry of Finance has outlined a special funding mechanism through which the U.S. (and potentially other donors) could transfer money to the GIRoA core budget targeted specifically to the District Delivery program. It has also indicated that it will work to bypass cumbersome central ministry budgeting mechanisms and procurement procedures to get resources quickly to the provincial and district levels. We will work with the Ministry to develop a responsive financing mechanism, consistent with USG regulations, that will enable GIRoA and

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district government units to deliver basic services effectively and accountably at the district level. Note: We are requesting separately a TDY visit by a team of USAID experts to help us craft a funding mechanism for use of U.S. monies.

Comment

¶10. If the DDWG process ultimately fulfills our expectations, in many ways it will offer a model for future GIRoA/donor assistance. It is a significant step forward that these major ministries are so engaged in the process (usually sending deputy minister-level representatives to DDWG meetings) and have assembled initial service delivery package proposals. We nonetheless see three challenges, which we label &the three F,s.8 The first is formulation.

As noted, Afghan ministries do not find it easy to work together, so getting them to come up with a single, coordinated package of services, rather than several individual ones, will require continued prodding and quite possibly support from us. We see this as a necessary and important capacity-building exercise.

¶11. The second challenge is fielding civil servants to the districts. This will be difficult for a host of reasons, most notably a lack both of qualified people and of adequate facilities in the field. It remains to be seen whether the ministries will succeed in attracting qualified civil servants through incentive packages or will have to resort to more expensive contract personnel.

¶12. Our final challenge involves funding. We are developing mechanisms to get the necessary funding out to the district level -- and get those resources translated into actual services delivered -- expeditiously, efficiently, transparently and accountably. This will be difficult, because under Afghanistan's centralized budget system, provinces and districts are not budget entities.

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